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THE CROSS
OF
QUEEN DAGMAR.







QUEEN DAGMAR'S CROSS,

FACSIMILE IN GOLD AND COLORS

OF

THE ENAMELED JEWEL

IN THE OLD-NORTHERN MUSEUM,

CHEAPINGHAVEN, DENMARK.

WITH INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

BY

PROF. GEORGE STEPHENS, F. S. A.,

Hon. Mem. of the Finnish Lit. Soc. Helsingfors, and of the Roy. Acad. of Ant. Gotenburg.

LONDON:

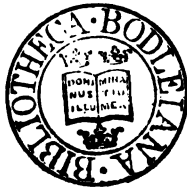
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TO

DOCTOR CHARLES DICKSON

AND

CONSUL OSCAR EKMAN,

GOTENBURG, SWEDEN.

THE CROSS OF QUEEN DAGMAR.

The world around us, "life as it is", and the annals of the Past in every age and clime, alike remind us of the vanity of earthly greatness, the frailty and deception of pomp and pride, the certainty that neither we nor our handiworks have here any abiding city, the truism that GOODNESS alone, blessing and being blest, shall never die, — that Birth and Rank cannot create, albe they may illustrate, VIRTUE, — that GENTLE DEEDS alone constitute true Gentility.

"But for ye speken of swiche gentillesse,
As is descendit out of old richesse,
Therefor schuld ye ben holden gentil men;
Swiche arrogauncé is not worth an hen.
Lok who that is most vertuous alway,
Privé and pert¹, and most entendith ay
To do the gentil dedés that he can,
Tak *him* for the grettest gentil man.
Crist, wol we clayme *of him* our gentillesse,
Nought of oure eldres for her² olde richesse."³

In the year 1205 one of the noblest and most powerful sovrans then ruling in Europe, WALDEMAR II OR THE VICTORIOUS, King of Denmark, sent a splendid embassy

under the bold Younker STRANGÉ to Meissen, and begged the hand of the young and fair DAGMAR MARGARETA, daughter of PREMYSL OTAKAR I, King of Bohemia, and ADELA of Meissen. She was not denied him, reacht Denmark that same year, and, in the words of the Ballad:

Silk along the earth was spread;
So many gilded pennants:
 To land that lady was y-led.
So sails the Younker Strangé to the Lady Dagmar.

His bride embraced he quick, I ween;
So many gilded pennants:
 Gave her gold-crown and name of Queen.
So sails the Younker Strangé to the Lady Dagmar.⁴

Wedded with great state at Ribe, her life was a dance on roses. Beloved by her husband, she was the Darling of his people. Beauty, mildness, mercy, drew every heart. Her first public act was one of grace and large-hearted sympathy. The day after her wedding, when she should crave her morning-gift:

Early on the morrow,
 Long ere it was day,
 It was the Lady Dagmar,
 For her morning-gift she'll pray.
They sail'd from the athelest⁵ Beyrland⁶.

'My first bede now I bid, dear,
 To my lowly prayer incline:
 Let go poor Bishop Waldemar,
 That long-lov'd uncle mine!
They sail'd from the athelest Beyrland.

'My second bede eke I bid now,
 So fain I ask thee it:
 Give up, lief lord, all Plough-pennies,
 And all in iron that sit!
They sail'd from the athelest Beyrland.⁷

As might be expected, she became and remains the idol of Denmark, worthily dividing the affection of the Commons with the redoubted Queen THYRE, “Danmarks Bót”, who built that Dane-wirke, (the great wall against the Saxons), whose newly-strengthened winding line is still a watchword and a battle-cry, — as afterwards with Queen MARGARET, “the Semiramis of the North”, that masculine heroine, a counterpart to our own ELISABETH, who by the famous Calmar-Union first gave shape to that deep longing for a Scådinavia, one free and great, which daily draws nearer to its fullest accomplishment.

Singularly enough, her very name assumed a popular form and a symbolical meaning. It was originally DRAGOMIR⁸ (the dear peacemaker), a Slavic appellation long borne by the females of her house. But this meant nothing in her new country, and it speedily past into DAGMAR (the Day-may, the Maiden of the Dawn), whereby alone she is now known all the North-lands over.

Thus reigning in all men’s hearts, year after year of quiet happiness flitted away. And during this period she must often have accompanied her kingly partner to Ringsted in Sælland, where stood a magnificent Church, the resting-place of Denmark’s Patron Saint HOLY CNUT MARTYR, her husband’s grandfather. This Cloister-Church, originally dedicated to Our Lady and St. Benedict, was then one of the finest in Northern Europe, and, in spite of melancholy alterations and “restorations”, is still a remarkable one. It had at this period become the Royal Mausoleum, the acknowledged death-home for the members of the Royal Dynasty, as well as their favorite

resort when living. Hence "Ringsted will soon see him", said of any Danish prince at this time, signified that Ringsted Church would soon see him deposited in one of its silent grave-kists.

But: *Fortune's Wheel stayeth not.* Seven short summers are gone, and, the pains of a cruel childbed overtaking her:

Queen Dagmar lieth in Ribe sick,
Ringsted her soon will see;
To leech-wives the wisest, all Denmark thro,
She sends in her agony.

Queen Dagmar she resteth there in Ringsted.⁹

Straightway feeling that all their help is useless, she dispatches a messenger for King WALDEMAR. When "the little page" reaches the "Dan-king" in his stronghold, — called by one copy of the Ballad the Castle of Gulland (Gotland), Gullands-borg, doubtless meaning some Royal Vill not very many miles off, — where he was playing at tables:

Dan-king the tables shutteth quickly,
Clatter'd the dice and sung: —
'God-the-Father in Heaven forbid it, now,
That Dagmar should die so young!'

Queen Dagmar she resteth there in Ringsted.

From Gullands-borg when the King rode off,
'Twas a hundred swains he had:
When he dasht and gallopt up Ringsted street,
Was with him but Dagmar's lad.

Queen Dagmar she resteth there in Ringsted.¹⁰

He comes in time to find his dear one a corpse, and to see the babe whom the midwives had cut from her side. But at his approach her strong love calls back her soul, and she takes leave of her lord, in that

short space having gone thro and escaped the pains of Purgatory, so venial had been her sins. She again prays for unhappy outlaws and fettered prisoners, and so expires once more, with the words:

'Night nor day pain none had I suffer'd,
No fire had come me nigh,
Had I not laced my sleeves one Sunday,
And my gold-cap sticht up high.'
Queen Dagmar she resteth there in Ringsted.

Her eyne she stroketh now once more,
Her cheeks they were so white:
'Heaven's Chimes, they are ringing for me,
No longer can I bide!'
*Queen Dagmar she resteth there in Ringsted.*¹¹

She expired May 24, 1212.

We need not recall the pomp of the funeral in Ringsted — the sweep of the procession to the beautiful Church, the chaunt of the priests, the sound of sweet music and the clouds of perfume from swinging censers, the display of banners and rich armor, and the final benediction, followed by some costly burial-monument.

But: *Fortune's Wheel stayeth not*, and:

"In later times the grave has been opened and rifled. It now contains only trifling and dubious remains of DAGMAR's body, and a couple of petty fragments of the old leaden coffin. In addition hereto was exhibited in Ringsted Church during the last century a Scull, as that of Queen DAGMAR. It was kept in a cupboard in the Church until, as stated in a manuscript¹² relative to that building dated 1769, "an ungodly fellow, some 14 or 16 years ago, found a chance of stealing it away."¹³

So! Walk up, Ladies and Gentlemen! Queen DAGMAR'S Scull! A penny a peep! — And thereafter, away with it to the Bone-house: "chapless, and knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade"¹⁴, — or to the nearest dunghill: — "That scull had a tongue in it, and could sing once: How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murther!"¹⁴

It was probably in connection with this barbarous plundering of her tomb, that her Cross again saw the light of day. Certain it is, that this precious work of art has always borne her name, and that ever since 1737 there has been a constant tradition that it was found in her grave, as generally exprest in the reign of CHRISTIAN V. The Danish antiquarian C. F. HERBST has shown¹⁵, that it was added to the collections of the Royal Danish "Kunstkammer" (Art-Chamber, the Palace Museum) as early as 1695, and even then with the express addition to the Protocol: "this is said to have been borne by Queen MARGARETA DAGMAR, King WALDEMAR II his spouse." There it remained till 1845, when it was transferred to the newly formed Museum of Northern Antiquities — which has since become so famous for its matchless treasures.

In the Museum it is a constant attraction; for if ever there was a woman regarded for centuries as Holy, it was Queen DAGMAR. Even down to the beginning of this year-hundred, when the farmer went to his bench in Ringsted Church, he first approacht the three graves where lie WALDEMAR and his two wives, and said: 'DAGMAR hail! BENERD fie!'

This BENERD, as she was commonly called, instead of BERENGUELA OR BERENGARIA, her real name, was a Portuguese princess. Her character contrasted so strongly with that of her predecessor, that BENERD became a nickname for cruelty and caprice.

The Royal Antiquarian King FREDERICK VII, who has so long and so zealously studied and protected the national monuments of his country, took this Cross as a memento-motive for a jeweled ornament, which he gave as a Keepsake to the Princess ALEXANDRA on her leaving the shores of Denmark. He caused a facsimile of the Cross to be made, arranged so as to open, and placed within it a small bit of Silk, a splint of Wood, and a tiny slip of Parchment.

The Silken stuff was cut from the silken cushion on which the head of HOLY CNUT, King and Patron Saint of Denmark, was found resting when his shrine was opened in Odense in 1833. This pillow is now preserved in the Old-Northern Museum.

The Splint was taken from a Reliquary of the middle age, now in the Old-Northern Museum, in which it lay, accompanied by a morsel of vellum, announcing ("de ligno dñi") that it was a bit of the Cross of Christ.

The Slip of Parchment bears the words: "Sericum de pulvinari Sti Canuti, Regis et Patroni Daniæ, manu Friderici VII Regis Daniæ abscissum" (*Silk from the pillow of St. Cnut, King and Patron of Denmark, cut off by the hand of Frederick VII, King of Denmark.*)

Thus King FREDERICK endeavored, in this respect also, to make the new Cross a true copy of the original. Its greatest value in the eyes of DAGMAR doubtless was, that it contained costly relics. So also he wisht the

Princess ALEXANDRA to commence her new career "with God", with a symbol of His Blessing, and in her new home still to muse on her fatherland and its Patron Saint.

The Facsimile Cross, thus become a Reliquary-locket, was attached to a necklace made by the Danish Court-jeweler DIDERICHSEN, and decorated in a suitable style. This costly ornament contains 2000 brilliants and rose-diamonds and 118 pearls. Of these latter, the two largest were bought for his Majesty at the last Great Exhibition in London.

The original Golden Cross here copied, the only one known to exist older than the year 1212, that of Queen DAGMAR's death, is of Byzantine workmanship. It is hollow, and doubtless contains Relics, but has never been opened, to avoid risk of injury. It is soldered together, and could only be divided with a saw.

On the one side is our Crucified Saviour, with figures below not unlike Swans. On the other are 5 small medallions, CHRIST in the centre, the Virgin MARY at his right, St. JOHN at his left, St. BASIL above, and St. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM below, their names, contracted, being in Greek letters.

My beautiful and exact Facsimile has been drawn by J. MAGNUS PETERSEN, engraved on wood by Messrs. HENNEBERG and ROSENSTAND, and printed by Messrs. THIELE, all of Cheapinghaven. The intermediate woodcut shows the thickness of the jewel.

NOTES.

¹ *Privé and pert*, privy and apert, secretly and openly; privately and publicly. — ² *her olde richesse*, their old power and dignity. — ³ These lines are from Chaucer, The Wife of Bath's tale (Canterbury Tales, lines 6691—6700). — ⁴ Svend Grundtvig, Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser, No. 132 (Vol. 3, p. 192, verses 35 and 36):

Der bleff silcke paa iorddenn bred:

Saa mange forgyll denne flye.

thennd fræckenn hun bleff y landenn lieed.

Saa seegler hand iuncker Strangy mod iumfru Daumuor.

Kongenn hand thog hynder y synn faffuen:

Saa mange &c.

hand gaff hinder guld-kronne och droninge-naffuen.

Saa seegler &c.

⁵ *athelest*, noblest. — ⁶ *Beyrland*, Bohemia. — ⁷ Same work, No. 133 (Vol. 3, p. 203, v. 9, 10, 11):

Aarlig om den morgen,

lenge før det vor dag:

det vaar fræcken Damor,

hun kraffued hendis morgen-gaffue.

• De selde aff ædeligste Beyrland.

'Den første bøn, der ieg eder beder,

den beder ieg eder saa blide:

i lader ud biskop Valdemar,

aller-kieriste morbroder min!

De selde &c.

'Den anden bøn, ieg eder beder,

den beder ieg ether saa gierne:

i giffuer alle ploffue-pending til,

oc alle fanger i iern!'

De selde &c.

⁸ Fred. Schiern, Om Dronning Dagmar. (Nyt historisk Tidsskrift, Kiøbenhavn, 1854, 8vo, p. 578.) — ⁹ Sv. Grundtvig, Danmarks G. F. No. 135, A (Vol. 3, p. 213, v. 1):

Dronning Damor ligger udi Ribe siug,

til Ringsted lader hun sig vente:

alle de fruer, i Danmarck er,

dennem lader hun til sig hente.

I Ringsted der huiler dronning Damor.

¹⁰ Same book, v. 13, 14:

Dan-kongen hand slou de taffibord sammen,
at alle de terning de siunge:
'Forbiude det Gud-fader i Himmerig,
at Damor skulde dø saa ung!'

I Ringsted &c.

Der kongen hand drog aff Gullands-borg,
da fulde hannem hundret suenne:
Og der hand kam til Ringsted,
da fulde hannem ickon Damors dreng.

I Ringsted &c.

¹¹ Same book, No. 135, B (Vol. 3, p. 215, v. 22, 23):

'Jegh thorde icke i pinenn brennde
baade dagh och nadt:
haffde ieg icke mine ermme om søndagen snørdt,
min naall i guld-hue sadt.'

Udi Rinnsted huilles dronning Dagmoer.

Dronningen sigh om øigenn skrøgh,
hinndes kinnder giordes møgedt huide,
'Nu ganger Himmeriges klocker for migh,
ieg maa icke lennger bidde.'

Udi Rinnsted &c.

¹² "The Thott Ms. collection, No. 1411, in the Great National Library, p. 11, 12, note. This piece was written by Sweistrup, assisted by the 'Quire-deacon' and Clerk Meitsfeldt, is dated Ringsted April 25, 1769, and is dedicated to Privy Councilor Count Otto Thott." — ¹³ Prof. J. J. A. Worsaae, in "Kongegravene i Ringsted Kirke, aabnede, istandsatte og dækkede med nye Mindestene ved Hans Maiestæt Kong Frederick den Syvende", fol. Kiøbenhavn 1858, p. 25. — ¹⁴ Shakespear's Hamlet, 5, 1. — ¹⁵ Kongegravene i Ringsted, p. 25.

Three of the Dagmar Ballads will be found in an English dress in Dr. R. C. Alexander Prior's Ancient Danish Ballads, London 1860, 8vo, Vol. 2, pp. 118—140.

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